

**Jeopardy Assessment**  
for the Proposed Incidental Taking Authorization  
of the Blanding's Turtle

**WDOT expansion of Lake Butte des Morts crossing of USH 41  
and relocation of ANR pipeline within USH 41 right-of-way  
Winnebago County, Wisconsin**

**Background**

In Wisconsin, Blanding's turtles have been listed as a threatened species since 1979. They were listed for several reasons including a very long maturation period (17-20 years), increased road mortality of adults--especially females, little evidence of successful recruitment, significant wetland habitat loss and habitat fragmentation. Blanding's turtles live throughout the state with the exception of the extreme north-central counties. They are most concentrated in the vast marshes along the Wisconsin River in Wood, Juneau, Adams, and Iowa Counties and along the Mississippi River. Blanding's turtles live primarily in marshes and shallow, vegetated bays of lakes, but can be found in almost any aquatic habitat including ponds, slow-moving rivers, trout streams and some northern bogs. They are semi-aquatic turtles and are known to move about regularly during the summer between various aquatic habitats and occasionally spend periods of time on land away from water. Blanding's turtles often overwinter in moving or deeper water to avoid freezing in winter. They are generally active from March to early November and breed in early spring and fall. Nesting usually begins in late May and runs through June. Females prefer to nest in well-drained sun-lit sandy soils in both natural and disturbed areas and are known to travel up to 1.5 miles from water to find suitable upland nesting sites. They typically return to the same nesting area each year.

**Jeopardy Assessment**

Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WDOT) proposes to construct an additional driving lane in each direction of USH 41 from STH 21 to USH 45, including the Lake Buttes des Morts crossing of USH 41. The existing causeway at the crossing will be widened and the bridge structures replaced. ANR currently has a pipeline located within the USH 41 right-of-way. In order to accommodate the expansion for USH 41, ANR will relocate the existing pipeline prior to the start of USH 41 construction, in addition to the relocation portions of the pipeline will also be replaced and buried deeper.

Wetlands suitable for Blanding's turtle occur along the western side of the existing USH 41 crossing and right-of-way. These wetlands will be temporarily disturbed by the pipeline relocation and some will be permanently impacted by the USH 41 road expansion and construction of new causeway and bridge structures. Wetlands impacts will be minimized and turtle fencing will be installed to keep turtles from entering the construction areas. Any turtles encountered in the construction area will be removed. The following conservation measures will be employed to help avoid or minimize the taking of Blanding's turtles.

**Conservation Measures Required for the Authorization**

The wetland corridor sections that support suitable Blanding's habitat will be surveyed during the course of placing turtle fencing in order to locate and move any turtles encountered. The project impact areas in suitable Blanding's habitat will be fenced using trenched-in silt fencing with turtle turnarounds, as per the 'turtle fence' standards, prior to any construction activities within these areas and these areas will be surveyed to conduct turtle removals. Surveys will involve visual reconnaissance by a qualified

herpetologist familiar with the species and its natural history. All turtles encountered will be moved out of the construction corridor and placed in adjacent suitable habitat. Once turtles have been moved and the fencing is in place, future risk to the turtles is expected to be negligible as long as the fencing is properly maintained until the work is completed.

The ANR pipeline fencing and relocation work will be completed prior to the start of construction of USH 41 expansion, and will follow the turtles conservation measures indicated above. The pipeline will result in temporary impacts to wetlands that will be restored upon completion of the work. Fencing for the USH 41 widening and causeway and bridge replacements will be installed prior to the active period of the turtles to keep turtles out of upland construction areas. If timing does not permit installation of fencing prior to the active period, fence installation and turtle removals will occur as indicated above. All turtles will be removed from wetlands impacts areas. Fencing will be maintained until the work is completed for the pipeline and the road project.

If the above measures are employed, the Department believes that the risk of take will be very minimal for this project. As such, it has determined that the proposed project will not jeopardize the continued existence or recovery of the state population of Blanding's turtles or the whole plant-animal community of which they are a part.